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RESILIENCE FROM A VARIETY OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: AN INTRODUCTION

The fast-changing world creates a challenging environment because each change calls for an effort to adjust. The world has been changing since time immemorial. Our times, namely the 21st century, is unique in that it bears witness to change which both accelerates and expands to a variety of areas. Change has turned into a cultural norm. Social approval to change is on the rise, and we are now also more inclined to ignore change or respond to it with surprise. We live in a period of rapid change affecting civilisation, culture, science, technology and customs or traditions. Change progresses so fast in certain areas that it is difficult to keep up with its pace. Thus, each personal resource which allows individuals to experience change in a positive or constructive way proves to be both inspiring for scientists and important pragmatically. One of these resources is also resilience, a particular disposition which marks the ability to bounce back after a crisis or when faced with difficulty or a protracted and stressful situation. The ability to bounce back from the depths of depression, helplessness or loneliness and return to normal life is one of the descriptive definitions of resiliency understood as a personal disposition. In this sense, resiliency is one of the conceptual categories which belong in the realm of “psychology in spite of all,” which identifies processes and mechanisms that protect individuals against the negative effect of risk factors and help them live healthy and normal lives despite justified fears of impending destruction. This pertains to situations which involve strong pathogenic factors that are likely to cause a crisis, illness and developmental disorders; and which, as expected, usually cause widely related health problems in a large proportion of the subjects involved in psychological studies. That being said, researchers working with people with mental health problems come across individuals who are able to withstand destruction, e.g. Werner (1996), who, in her longitudinal study

carried out in the Hawaii on infants exposed to reproductive and environmental risk factors, demonstrated that, after 40 years, the same infants developed into resilient, caring, competent and confident adults; or Antonovsky (1987, 1991), who identified resilient individuals in a group of the then elderly Nazi concentration camp survivors. The question of processes and mechanisms which protect individuals against developmental disorders, illness and disability is directly related to the problem of resilience.

Ogińska-Bulik and Juczyński (2008, 2014) emphasise the temporal aspect of resiliency, which nonetheless should be more adequately defined as resilience, the term being also more accepted in the relevant literature. The latter approach defines resilience not only as a personal disposition or a personal resource but also as the ability to exercise this disposition in the process of coping with difficulty (Heszen, Sęk, 2007). Each process has its beginning and, by definition, its end. It must be added that the adverbial modifier “by definition” is key here, which is due to certain types of coping, e.g. unprocessed mourning after the loss of a relative, its resolution being difficult to predict.

Resilience manifests itself through a number of skills and personal dispositions. These include capacity for the cognitive processing of reality in each temporal aspect and in such a way that it is possible to acknowledge its positive sides. Capacity for gratitude is key when it comes to the past. Capacity for happiness has the same effect on the present. Capacity for optimism plays the same role with regard to the future. If one adopts a positive perspective on our fast-changing world, it is difficult not to notice how increasingly attractive the notion of health has become for social sciences, regardless of whether it is defined behaviourally as a healthy or health-promoting behaviour; axiologically as a norm or a value established in the moral hierarchy of an individual; or developmentally as a process of developing health resources during ontogenesis. The present day places much importance on health, health promotion and categories such as healthy or unhealthy reality. This health-oriented atmosphere is also conducive to new advances in the studies on resilience, which, together with immunity, determines health and helps individuals to both develop their potential resources and fight off disease.

The fast-changing world also reveals one more field to be studied by social sciences, namely the positive in a broad sense of the word, including positive emotions and motivations, and not only anxiety, anger and sorrow, the latter series being a typical object of interest from the psychology of emotions. The categories explored by contemporary researchers also include positive manifestations of mental life such as well-being, happiness, self-esteem, self-agency, coherence, the meaning of life and spirituality, and not only behavioural disorders, illness and developmental handicap. Resilience naturally belongs in this positive conceptual field as a notion which is itself positive and, as demonstrated in the studies presented in this monograph, intertwined with other positive mental mechanisms.

The relevant literature commonly defines resilience as capacity for change and the ability to adjust to change (Ostrowski, 2014; Sikorska, 2014). Researchers in

resilience discourage their readers from “banging your head against a brick wall” when the existing conditions preclude reaching your goal. It is difficult not to agree with this observation, but the notion of resilience as capacity for change is hardly the only one. The fast-changing world requires that individuals must find an equilibrium between their respective abilities to adjust and resist change. This means retaining a broadly defined individual stability, which, as every system, disintegrates when it loses its anchoring. In this particular context, resilience also means the ability to stick to one’s goals despite emerging difficulties and through flexible adaptation strategies. This marks the ability to stand by the principles of one’s identity such as gender, nationality, value hierarchy and opinions. However, this hardly implies being impervious to the new, which is typical of “mental old age,” the actual age notwithstanding. The understanding of resilience as constancy only highlights the role of the ability to remain oneself in a fast-changing world and to stand by the authorities and values which are universally treated as objective entities. Thus understood, resilience seems to be a necessary resource for individuals, and it also serves as an inspiration for theoretical reflections and scientific researches in the field covered by this monograph.

The monograph consists of four sections which focus on four respective areas: resilience in philosophical and existential contexts, social contexts of resilience, promoting resilience and assisted resilience and, last but not least, contemporary threats to mental health.

The first section, which is entitled “Resilience in the Philosophical and the Existential Contexts,” comprises three different chapters, each of which offering philosophical and existential perspectives on resilience.

The concept of resilience, as argued by Tadeusz M. Ostrowski (2014), is becoming increasingly attractive for social sciences. One of the problems which are often covered by the relevant literature is the existential basis for individual motivation, with particular emphasis on the meaning of life as a whole or on the meaning in life as a criterion for prioritising one’s life goals according to their subjective import for an individual. In his chapter, Ostrowski explores correlations between the meaning of life and resilience by providing an empirical verification of the hypothesis which propounds that resilience is determined by experiential mechanisms such as the meaning of life, axiological sensitivity (sensitivity to values) and the sense of individual freedom (free ego). The author has developed a fitting self-assessment tool to conduct research based on his own theory of the meaning of life, also known as the libertial-value-grounded theory. His findings corroborate the hypothesis on the existential determinants of resilience and open up new areas for scientific enquiry.

In the following chapter, Christopher Gill takes the reader from motivation theory to the philosophical foundations of behaviour to offer resilience-building practices based on the legacy of ancient Stoicism. By drawing on ancient thinkers (Epictetus, Cato) and contemporary researchers (Damasio), Gill reveals similarities in their respective approaches to coping with adversity. In his description of the

British project *Stoicism Today*, the author shows how the concept of resilience remains attractive to our contemporaries. The slogan “Live like a Stoic for a Week” has drawn a surprisingly large number of participants to the project, which combines such ideas as Stoic mindfulness and resilience training. As the workshop concluded, an increase in well-being and resilience was observed in persons who were actively engaged in the project.

Konrad Banicki also draws on Stoic philosophy as one of possible resilience resources for soldiers. He offers an insight on several military applications of Stoicism, ranging from the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius to contemporary soldiers involved in operations in Vietnam and Iraq. One of the important themes in Banicki’s work is his observations on American pilot James Stockdal, who fell back on Epictetus’ philosophy during his seven years of captivity in Vietnam and used the teachings of ancient philosophy as his survival kit in this extreme and disorienting environment. The author reviews his insights by pointing out both strengths and weaknesses inherent in Stoic suggestions on resilience for soldiers.

The second section of the book comprises three chapters and is entitled “Social Contexts of Resilience.”

An intriguing analysis of the “rough, tough and resilient” was in turn offered by Bożena Gulla and Kinga Tucholska. The authors aim to demonstrate how resilience is developed in persons with criminal record. The authors present a constellation of psycho-social factors which affect resilience and foster resilient behaviours in their both socially acceptable and unacceptable forms. They also offer suggestions on how to work with people serving isolation sentences to foster their resilience levels or to stop their decline in a stressful environment.

In the second chapter, Monika Wasilewska and Małgorzata Kuleta present their clinically derived observations on the relationship between parentification and resilience. Their observations are based on the analysis of maturity levels in defence mechanisms used by adults who once were parentified children. The authors offer a distinction between instrumental parentification, which does not burden the child emotionally, and emotional parentification, the latter being more threatening to an individual. The authors summarise their findings by saying that parentification in a family has health-threatening consequences, and that it is important to develop successful therapeutic methods for the restructuring of defence systems in more mature individuals who are able to withstand internal pressures and external stressors.

The subsequent chapter, too, deals with penitentiary psychology. Przemysław Piotrowski and Stefan Florek focus on Teaching Art in Prison. The authors present findings derived from two projects: “The Labyrinth of Freedom” and “The Horizon of Freedom,” both carried out by psychologists and visual artists working in Polish prisons. They quote examples from these two projects to point out that artistic programmes, which are already in place in penitentiary institutions, are worth keeping in mind as a valuable suggestion for art rehabilitation practices.

The third section comprises five chapters and is entitled “Promoting of Resilience and Assisted Resilience.”

Michelle Jayman, Madeleine Ohl, Bronach Hughes and Pauline Fox present an intriguing account of the “Pyramid” intervention project, which was carried out to improve the socio-emotional health of young people in early secondary education. As the project concluded, a decrease in behavioural concerns (emotional problems and peer conflicts) and an improvement in pro-social behaviours were revealed. The authors assess the programme as a valuable, interesting and effective tool to help young people maximise their psycho-social capital.

The reader can also learn more about the opportunities for resilience stimulation in childhood offered by the “Brave Children!” programme, which is designed for preschool children. Iwona Sikorska and Marta Paluch provide an overview of classes conducted for half a year with preschool children: children involved in the study, when set against the control group, showed both a significant increase in protective factors and a decrease in behavioural concerns. The resilience components measurement covered the following areas: initiative, self-control, attachment and total protective factors.

The subsequent chapter offers a musicologist’s and a musical therapist’s perspectives on the importance of music as a stress-reducing medium. Alicja Ryczkowska touches upon the subject which belongs in the wide area of contemporary music psychology. As she describes criteria for selecting personalised music for patients, Ryczkowska points out that music is chosen by a music therapist for mood improvement on the basis of the ISO and the LEVEL principles. Another interesting aspect of this chapter is that it also focuses on the effect of such purely musical factors as pace, rhythm and harmonic structure on human physiology.

The authors of the subsequent chapter, Lidia Baran and Magdalena Hyla, focus on the importance of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for mental health and resilience. They elaborate on the concept of psychological flexibility based on the processes of acceptance, mindfulness, commitment and behavioural change. The authors point out that the value of the ACT approach lies in the fact that it stimulates six crucial health-promoting processes such as defusion, acceptance, flexible contact with the present moment, self as a context, values and committed action.

The following chapter focuses on the adolescence crisis according to the positive prevention approach. Arleta Michalik offers a perspective divergent from the traditional prevention approach to analyse difficulties in the social adaptation of young people. The author draws on positive psychology and the normative character of identity explorations in adolescents to emphasise that difficulties in social adaptation are a necessary stage for young people to develop their own resources.

The fourth section comprises four chapters which focus on “Threats to Mental Health.”

Krzysztof Gerc and Marta Jurek elaborate on intrapsychic and sociodemographic correlates of the meaning of life in mothers who raise a child with neurologically based motor impairment. The child’s disability significantly alters their life

situation, modifies their needs and their ability to act on their own, verifies their goals and the ways they use to reach them, and also offers new challenges. The project outcomes reveal that the meaning of life in mothers significantly correlates with their selected personality traits and their sense of alienation. No relationship with both socio-demographic variables and health-related variables in children has been established. Of equal interest are relationships between the quality of life in mothers and their coping strategies.

Being overworked poses another threat to mental health. Beata Mańkowska elaborates on the subject by exploring professional burn-out in social workers. In her attempt to establish a relationship between personality types, coping styles and professional burn-out, the author uses hierarchical cluster analysis to obtain four profiles with different characteristics. The study serves as important food for thought in that it provides practical suggestions on how to prevent burn-out in this particular group of professionals.

Apart from environmental factors, health may also be threatened by disease or injury. Aleksandra Kroll explores the subject of communication disorders as a threat for mental health in patients with brain damage and their immediate environment. The author uses a case study method to present a variety of perspectives with which to interpret the situation of adult patients with aphasia.

Krzysztof Gąsior, Jan Chodkiewicz and Wojciech Cechowski in turn share a number of interesting diagnostic suggestions on how to measure resilience. The KOP- 26 Questionnaire has been designed for adult patients. The authors describe the questionnaire's development, structure, purpose and statistical parameters. The KOP- 26 Questionnaire seems to be an intriguing methodological suggestion for resilience research.

The respective chapters of the monograph furnish a variety of theoretical and scientific contexts which highlight the importance of resilience for health *in* a contemporary world and a rapidly changing environment, or changing times, as is suggested by the monograph's title. The universal application in the cultural context and in a wider perspective offered by social sciences creates the need and also offers the opportunity to analyse resilience in the light of lifespan developmental psychology (see chapters written by: Wasilewska and Kuleta, Sikorska and Paluch, Jayman and al., Michalik).

The theoretical construct of resilience described as a set of individual competencies which allow for creative and flexible coping with difficulty, when combined with the ability to foster positive emotions, offers a broader angle on individual development and also better tools for the description of dynamics in demographically and psychologically varying social groups (chapters written by: Ostrowski, Sikorska and Paluch, Gulla and Tucholska, Piotrowski and Florek, Gerc and Jurek). Resilience, which this monograph studies and analyses from the interdisciplinary perspective, allows for a fuller description of the synergy effect between a number of mental factors, the phenomenon of which was previously covered in the literature (Waller, 2001; Juczyński, Ogińska-Bulik, 2012). The

synergy occurs under the influence of environmental determinants and biological variables affecting human development (Tedeschi, Calhoun, 2004; Gerc, 2011; Sikorska, 2014). This effect is now being explored by defining and estimating the possible degree to which selected traits manifest themselves in individuals, the whole process being more or less expected socially and developmentally (the monograph focuses on traits related to resilience).

Both popular parlance and commonly held contemporary views, the two being intertwined due to the symbolic nature of language and ideas, offer a wide array of terms which science considers vague or imprecise, e.g. desired, beneficial traits; an ideal or favourable environment; and their respective antonyms. Nonetheless, the necessary basis to define and evaluate the determinants of mental health and resilience is provided by criteria which are evolutionary developed, described by science and preserved by the often neglected cultural transmission of ideas. This monograph elucidates on terms and ideas (e.g. resilience, resiliency, instrumental and emotional parentification, protective factors, psychological flexibility, socio-emotional health, etc.) which are now widely accepted in the social sciences lexicon. The aim of the authors in their respective chapters is to make these concepts, which are regarded as universal and explored in an interdisciplinary manner, as operational and as accurate as possible. Another goal is to provide the most possible lucid description of the relationships between them.

The monograph's title implies a general question, i.e. is there a specific and evolutionary developed adaptation model which fosters capacity for resilience and mental health in almost any circumstances, no matter how inhospitable? In their attempts to answer these and other questions of similar kind, the authors of the monograph avoid idealistic assumptions as they adopt a more descriptive perspective on both human capacity for adaptation and a variety of human activities (see: Gill, Banicki, Ostrowski, Sikorska and Paluch, Jayman and al., Gerc and Jurek).

The authors of the monograph have designed its title and content in such a way that it takes into account the process of change in the understanding of human nature, mental health and its determinants, life orientation, intended behaviours, the ability to communicate with one's environment and the structure and function of various processes affecting individuals (see chapters written by: Gill, Banicki, Ostrowski, Sikorska and Paluch, Piotrowski and Florek, Wasilewska and Kuleta, Baran and Hyla, Mańkowska, Gerc and Jurek, Kroll). The individually and temporally varying insights on experiential circumstances cast an intriguing light on resilience in a rapidly changing world (Gill, Banicki, Ostrowski, Wasilewska and Kuleta). It should also be emphasised that the interdisciplinary character of this monograph allows researchers to revise or update their scientific notions and classifications (Gill, Ostrowski) by narrowing down or expanding their scope (Sikorska and Paluch, Piasecka, Jayman and al., Gerc and Jurek) on the one hand, and to promote terms and ideas described and verified by scientific researchers to reach the general public and public discourse on the other (Mańkowska, Jayman and al., Ryczkowska, Kroll).

For the authors of the monograph, the initial question of the scientific relevance of resilience and the respective attempts to answer it using a wide array of philosophical, sociological, psychological and pedagogical perspectives which touch upon the issue of resilience in a fast-changing world is a necessary condition (due to specific implications and theoretical assumptions) to provide new inspirations for researchers and to launch innovative projects aimed at mental health promotion.

The above inspirations may impact further studies on the issues such as the development and evolution of the concept of resilience and various classifications and understandings of the ability to adjust to a rapidly changing environment and its structure. While exploring the latter, it is necessary to focus more on social inclusion with regard to individuals who were hitherto considered physically, sensorily, socially and culturally different.

In their theoretical explorations and empirical analyses, the authors of the respective chapters in the monograph also demonstrate that mental health may now be studied in a scientifically valid way as a problem which is both social and individual. However, the social paradigm lays more emphasis on motivation and individual attempts to adjust to one's social environment, and the resulting perspective furnishes a supraindividual angle on taking the responsibility of one's development and adaptation processes.

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